

## SUPPORT for HB 4597, 4598, 4599, and 4600

June 16, 2009

Dear Chairman Corriveau and Health Policy Committee Members,

As a licensed clinical social worker for the past nineteen years, I have seen the discrimination applied to those with mental illness and emotional impairment when they are denied the same opportunity for coverage under their medical insurance plan as their medically ill counterparts. It is unjust and not fair.

As a parent of a child who used to have a diagnosis of autism and testified before this committee two weeks ago, I can tell you that the discrimination toward individuals with autism is even worse! Individuals with mental illness at least get *some* coverage. A child with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder or depression is at least entitled to *some* sessions of therapy, even if there is a co-pay attached or a maximum number of sessions. A child with autism is **excluded** from the very same policy, is not entitled to any type of treatment, and is virtually written off as being untreatable and without hope.

- Parity legislation requires insurance companies to provide the same coverage for individuals with mental health care coverage as it does for individuals with medical coverage. However, since autism currently is not a reimbursable diagnosis under either mental health OR medical, individuals with autism will not benefit from parity legislation.
- 47 states have enacted parity laws, yet families of individuals with autism in these states are still fighting for autism insurance legislation. Since enacting parity laws, they have come to realize that parity does not help people with autism!
- Autism is a unique condition, requiring a multitude of therapies. Without specification of the types of therapies used effectively in treating autism, insurers possess more latitude to deny coverage for autism treatment. Parity laws are not sufficient to enforce insurance companies to cover these specialized types of treatment for autism.
- ***Treatment for autism works.*** It is a cost savings to society in the long run. Michigan cannot legislate parity and autism together. Parity will not cover autism. Mental health parity legislation, while admirable in its own right, should be considered independently from autism insurance legislation.

Therefore, while I support both the Mental Health Parity bills and the Autism Insurance legislation bills, I ask that you keep these issues completely separate, and consider each one on its individual merits alone. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie C. Harlan, LMSW, ACSW, BCD

*Mom to Justin, 10 year old boy who recovered from autism through expensive therapies which were not covered by my Blue Care Network insurance*